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FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6760
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RUEPGDA/USEUCOM JIC VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000363

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

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TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLS](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: HOSTAGE-TAKING, SITREP # 20

REF: LAGOS 346

Classified By: Acting Political/Economic Chief Shannon Ross
for reasons 1.4 (D/E).

Hostage Welfare Update

¶1. (C) Delta State Government officials had no updates on hostage welfare except to say that they are in good health. Conoff in Warri continues to ask for recent proof of life. Shell reports there will be another visit to the camp by journalists with a good track record of access to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) this weekend; the crisis group agreed to dispatch family letters to the hostages via the journalists.

Hostage Negotiations

¶2. (C) Ijaw advocate Oronto Douglas confirmed he was asked by militants to act as their liaison with the Federal Government (FG). Douglas said he has had no contact with the federal or state government to confirm their willingness to negotiate with the Ijaw community (reftel). He asked to meet with USG officials, and we are coordinating these efforts.

¶3. (C) British Foreign Minister Jack Straw called President Obasanjo yesterday to ask whether he would accept the two main demands, i.e. no military reprisals and the formation of a permanent committee to work with the FG on Delta development and political issues. Obasanjo promised the situation would be resolved peacefully and that, while the proposed committee would not be formed until after the hostages were released, he had created a new committee to address socio-economic development in the Delta.

Ijaw Attacks: Shell Facilities Still Closed

¶4. (C) Around 17:00 yesterday, a fuel barge owned by Dutch

dredging company Westminster and two naval escort boats were attacked at the Ekeremor Junction on the way from Warri to the Forcados terminal. Press reports as many as 14 soldiers dead in the skirmish, but Defense Attaché sources report 4 soldiers and 1 mobile policeman were killed in execution style. Oil industry sources claimed this attack was in retaliation for the military allegedly killing 6 militants in the skirmish on board the CMS Spirit yesterday. A statement from the militants published in the media claims the military provoked the skirmish by attacking a militia boat.

15. (C) Exxon Mobil has clarified yesterday's community invasion of their Qua Iboe Terminal (QIT) in Akwa Ibom was a blockade of their front gate, and did not penetrate the premises. Protestors from the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw people in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) blockaded the entrance to the terminal, agitated for compensation for an oil spill in 1998, and gave the company 10 days to make an offer. The protest was peaceful, although workers could not enter the QIT until after 2:00 a.m.

Military Update

16. (C) A Nigerian army colonel told a Financial Times journalist the shoot-out between military and militants yesterday was ordered by new Joint Task Force commander General Ilogho with the intent to make a "strong statement" at the start of his command. He said Ilogho was fresh out of the Nigerian War College and not involved with bunkering.

17. (C) A highly placed military source was confident the
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hostages would be released Friday.

Media Update

18. (SBU) A front page article in the Washington Times reports statements from MEND, alleging they will not take hostages in the future and they "have sufficiently warned expatriate workers to leave the Niger Delta." The Punch newspaper reported U.S. and U.K. Conoffs in Warri by name, alleging they were pressuring the Delta State government to more quickly secure the release of the hostages. In the same article, an Adnkronos International website is reported to have published pictures of the militants along with an al-Qaeda message of support, "Allah supports you, oh Lions of Nigeria." Dow Jones newswires published a letter reportedly from Dokubo Asari sent through his spokesman Cynthia White, egging the militants on and urging them to establish a radio station. An organization affiliated with Asari has also publicly taken up the compensation claim against Exxon Mobil. Willbros denied press reports that they have withdrawn from the western Delta region.

Consular Update

19. (C) There have been no reports of additional attacks on AmCits. One mission Conoff is in Warri monitoring negotiations and prepared to assist with repatriation. The UK also has a consular officer in Warri to monitor negotiations and assist with repatriation. The head of Shell Security is on standby for repatriation assistance.
HOWE